



INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

Chair's Corner



Happy New Year!

With the beginning of the calendar year, our FEB has events planned and training scheduled for YOU!

Right away we are re-starting the annual Federal Employee Awards to recognize your high performers. January begins the **annual Awards cycle** - the open period for our

FEB to receive nominations from Federal agencies in Houston. Be sure to take time to nominate your best and your brightest employees and teams for our annual Award competition! The nomination package is available on our website at: <http://www.oklahoma.feb.gov/Forms/HoustonFEB2017AwardsPkg.docx>

You will also want to be sure to register your nominee(s) for the big Federal Employee Awards event scheduled for Monday, May 15, 2017 so we may all recognize their accomplishments. The Awards registration form will be distributed in January.

We have also surveyed agencies in the Houston area about topics for a quarterly FEB-sponsored leadership training series. The results are in, and we have the date we need. We hope to launch the first of the series in February.

Our **FY 17 Hazardous Weather & Emergency Communication Plan** is available on our website. For your convenience, you can easily download, print or read, online at www.oklahoma.feb.gov/Forms/2017HazCoordinationHouston.docx

Our local FEB website has been updated. Please visit www.oklahoma.feb.gov/HoustonFEB.htm to find a multitude of resources. If you have suggestions, please contact LeAnn.Jenkins@gsa.gov.

January also marks when we begin to think about all the documents required to file our Federal and State Taxes. **MyFreeTaxes** is an effort that our FEB coordinates with IRS and non-profit organizations, allowing federal employees (military and civilian), as well as their family members, who earned less than \$64,000 to file their 2016 tax return electronically at no cost. This collaborative effort also allows the individual to file their State Income Tax return with no filing fee. Additional information is provided on this website

oklahoma.feb.gov/HoustonMyFreeTaxes.htm

And don't forget about our **Facebook** page for timely information! <https://www.facebook.com/HoustonFEB/>

The Houston FEB is participating in a ***Generic Qualitative Exploration of Federal Teleworkers' Experiences (Research Project)***. While the study is being completed through Capella University, Minneapolis, MN, the researcher conducting this study is Danita Woodson, a doctoral learner in the Houston area. Information on how to participate is provided on page 10 of this newsletter. I encourage everyone to participate; she will share her findings with the FEB upon completion.

I look forward to seeing you at one or some of our many planned activities this year!!!

Timothy Jeffcoat, Chairman

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HOW TO SET SOFT GOALS AND MEASURE SOFT RESULTS

Achieving results is a walk in the park compared to navigating the fuzzy side of leadership. Measuring success is even more difficult.

The soft stuff:

1. Building relationships.
2. Managing energy.
3. Staying curious.

Technical skills become less valuable and relational skills become more valuable the longer you lead.



Overcoming feelings of hypocrisy:

It feels insincere to measure the relational aspect of leadership. For example, setting a goal to have a two minute conversation with three employees may seem fake or manipulative.

1. Intention and motivation answer concerns about setting goals around the soft side of leadership.
2. Be transparent with intention. 'I'm working to be a better connector.'
3. Reflect on motivation. Perhaps mutual enrichment is enough motivation to elevate you above feeling like a hypocrite because you set a goal of three personal conversations a day.

Accept, even express frailties. 'I'm just not good at showing appreciation. I'm working on it this month. I feel appreciative. It's just hard to express.'

Transparency answers feelings of hypocrisy when learning new behaviors.

Soft goals:

1. Ask two questions before making any statements.
2. Go on a gratitude walkabout three times a week.
3. Learn what motivates the people on your team – one person a day.
4. Monitor energy in individuals. Inquire when you see energy dip or rise. 'What just happened for you?'

Measuring the soft stuff:

It feels awkward to measure the relationship side of leadership. Maybe you feel like a hypocrite to set a goal of building a new relationship this month. Add the aspect that relationships are two sided affairs and it becomes even more difficult.

When it comes to the soft stuff:

1. Measure behaviors. 'I'm giving one personal affirmation every day.'
2. Explore impact. Are people more or less energized when you're around, for example?
3. Enjoy results.

Taken from LeadershipFreak blog:

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/11/12/how-to-set-soft-goals-and-measure-soft-results/>

Spotlighting Information in Public Service

Did you Know?

Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration

Houston National Cemetery had its dedication ceremony on December 7, 1965, being the only government cemetery constructed in the United States during the 1960's. The cemetery has 419 acres, with more than 200 acres still to be developed. Since it's opening, the cemetery has interred over 95,000 Vets and spouses.

The hemicycle at the Houston National Cemetery is the largest memorial and the most visible structure on the grounds. It's the only NCA-managed hemicycle memorial in the U.S. In the hemicycle area, there is a chapel, carillon and a speaker's stand, where we conduct the Memorial Day program and the Wreaths Across America program in December.

Houston National Cemetery has four (4) Medal of Honor Recipients interred in these hallowed grounds, along with one Congressman, Albert Thomas, who was a WWI Vet and instrumental in bringing the national cemetery to Houston.

Burial in a national cemetery is open to all armed forces members who have met a minimum active duty service requirement and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. A Veteran's spouse, widow or widower, minor dependent children and under certain conditions, unmarried adult children with 100% disabilities may also be eligible for burial. Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who die while on active duty or die while on training duty or were eligible for retirement pay, may also be eligible for burial.

Military funeral honors for Veterans and service members are provided by the Department of Defense at no cost to the family. The funeral director will contact the appropriate Military Service Branch or authorized provider, such as a Veterans Service Organization to arrange for the funeral honors detail.



THE 10-C APPROACH TO PUSHBACK WHEN THE BOSS IS INVOLVED AND STAKES ARE HIGH

Pushback makes you relevant and useful in high-stakes situations.



Poor pushback:

1. Emotional heat. Drama is distraction, even offense, to top leaders.
2. Grudges. You look narrow and small when you can't let go when pushback fails. You're going to lose some arguments.
3. Personal attacks.
4. Preference over fact. It's about research, data, and information, not personal preferences.

Pushback matters most when it's hard to give.

The 10-C approach for pushback:

#1. Conviction. Believe in something. Never push-back as a default response.

Always push for better when pushing back.

#2. Courage. Conviction without courage turns into complaining and backstabbing.

Courage to push back includes:

1. Careful preparation. Bravado is the result of wishful thinking.
2. Tested assumptions.
3. Clear points of defense.
4. Willingness to lose.

Courage moves organizations forward. Fear defeats talent.

#3. Candor. Dancing around the pole of veracity irritates people in authority.

Leaders don't like waiting for punchlines.

#4. Compassion. Seek the highest good with useful kindness.

1. Be sensitive to appearances. How does pushback make others look?
2. Choose private over public.
3. Give respect to earn respect.

#5. Competence. Push back in your areas of expertise.

#6. Consistency.

1. Consistently embrace humility.
2. Live by principles, not conveniences.
3. Practice emotional steadiness.

#7. Connection. Strive for deeper connection because of – not inspire of – pushing back. Fallout from pushing back poorly hinders careers and hampers relationships.

Relationship is the foundation for successful pushback.

#8. Collaboration. How can you include others, even while pushing back?

#9. Curiosity. Stay open.

1. Who might have insights?
2. Who is impacted by your perspective?
3. Who might help you push back successfully?

#10. Clarity of purpose. Why are you pushing back in the first place? Does it matter?

You're bound for success if you skillfully push back in high-stakes situations and top leaders are involved.

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/the-10-c-approach-to-pushback-when-the-boss-is-involved-and-stakes-are-high/>

TSP 101 – Thrift Savings Plan Basics

The Thrift Savings Plan is a defined contribution plan similar to a 401(k) plan in the private sector, and has been in existence for over 30 years.



It is considered a “qualified plan” – or a type of retirement plan that is established by an employer (in this case, the federal government) for the benefit of their employees. Qualified retirement plans not only allow us to defer a portion of our salary (thereby reducing our taxable income for the year in which we make our contribution) they also give employers a tax break for the contributions they make for their employees.

As a defined contribution plan, the TSP is different from defined benefit plans like our CSRS and FERS pensions. In our pensions, the benefit we will receive upon retirement is defined by already known factors. The factors that define the benefit we receive from CSRS or FERS are our length of service and our high-three average annual salary.

There is no defined benefit in our TSP; the only thing that is defined is how much we contribute. We can elect contributions of a percentage of our salary, or as a fixed dollar amount per pay period. FERS employees receive employer matching contributions up to the point where they contribute 5% of their salary. CSRS employees do not receive a matching contribution.

So, if the benefit we receive is not defined by a formula, how do we know how much we will receive from the TSP once we begin

taking money out? We don’t know. The amount of money we will receive from the TSP is based on three major things:

– How much we contribute to the TSP

It stands to reason that, if everything else is equal, a person who puts more money in the TSP will receive more in TSP payments than a person who contributes less.

– How we allocate our TSP balance among the available funds

Historically, some TSP funds have done better than others. Of course, with 20/20 hindsight we know how well funds have performed; we don’t know how they will perform. We can make assumptions based on past performance, but they are just that – assumptions.

– How we withdraw money from the TSP

There is no guaranteed benefit from the TSP unless we elect the annuity option, which is the least popular of the withdrawal options. If we’re taking monthly payments (the most popular of the options) we have the possibility of running out of money before we run out of time. Conversely, we can be so cautious in our withdrawals that we die with more money remaining in the TSP than was our original intention.

Because there is no guarantee that we will receive money from the Thrift Savings Plan for the rest of our lives, we cannot just put our TSP on autopilot and hope that we have enough money when we retire. We have to pay attention to the TSP while we are contributing and then again when we are withdrawing money from it.

FEDweek’s free TSP Investment Report is intended to help you be more informed of the features of the TSP and of how to best make use of those features. We hope you like it!

Article taken from:

<http://www.fedweek.com/tsp/tsp-101/>

HOW ANY LEADER CAN KICKSTART AND LAND POWERFUL CONVERSATIONS

You look for an escape when blabbing leaders arrive. But a leader skilled at powerful conversations is a thing of beauty.



10 questions to kickstart powerful conversations:

1. What would make this conversation a success for you today?
2. What's giving you the most energy these days? What does that say about you?
3. What's on your mind?
4. What are you learning?
5. What crossroads are you at today?
6. What would you like to get out of this conversation?
7. How would you like to move the ball forward today?
8. Would you like me to listen, coach, or advise you today?
9. Where do you feel you are wasting energy?
10. How have you succeeded since our last conversation?

My two favorites are: What's on your mind?
What would you like to get out of this conversation?

10 questions to land powerful conversations:

The way you land a conversation solidifies its value.

1. If I saw you moving forward as a result of our conversation, what would I see you doing differently? (If you want different results, you must choose different behaviors.)
2. What's shifting in your thinking? Follow this with, what's important to you about that?
3. Who might join you as you move forward? Encourage people to share their goals with others.
4. What would you like me to ask you next time? (Personal favorite.)
5. What was useful today?
6. What seems clearer for you today?
7. What do you plan to do between now and our next conversation? When? How?
8. What does success look like as you move forward?
9. What worked best for you during our conversation?
10. What do you need to stop doing?

5 results of powerful conversations:

1. Connection.
2. Self-discovery.
3. Clarity.
4. Forward movement.
5. Accountability.

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/11/22/how-any-leader-can-kickstart-and-land-powerful-conversations/>

HOW INTENSE CURIOSITY ABOUT PEOPLE ENHANCES INFLUENCE AND EXPANDS LEADERSHIP

Leadership curiosity includes:

1. Curiosity about events. What's happening?
2. Curiosity about mistakes. What went wrong?
3. Curiosity about next steps. What's next?
4. Curiosity about best practices. What's working?

Leadership curiosity is often about getting things done, not people on the team. It's transaction, more than relational. People become tools, if you aren't careful.

Humility isn't simply being curious. It's intense curiosity about people.

Curiosity about what's next – apart from curiosity about people – comes off as pressure. Additionally, it's possible that curiosity about mistakes is a form of arrogance.

Humble curiosity:

I feel a shift in myself when I move away from what I want to get done and toward intense curiosity about people.

Authentic curiosity about people is the tipping point between real influence and manipulation.

Influence and effectiveness expand with intense curiosity about people.

Manipulation is inconsistent with intense curiosity about the challenges others face. *Influence is built on understanding people. Curiosity is a beginning.*

Intense curiosity about others is:

1. Respectful. Curiosity about others expresses high regard for others.
2. Open. When you have the answer, you use it to evaluate others.
3. Courageous. Humble curiosity digs into tough issues.
4. Accepting. People have strengths AND weaknesses. *You must know*

and accept people before you can help them find their place of impact.

5. Compassionate.

6. Relational.

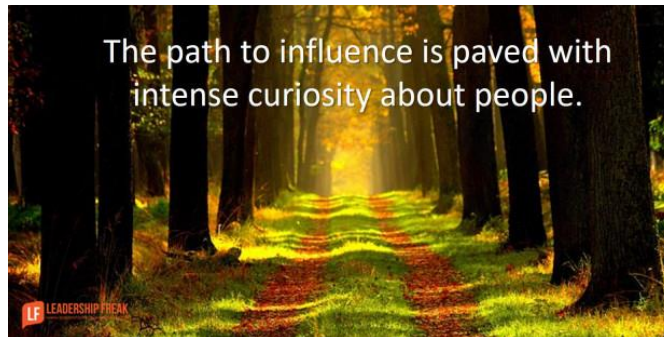
7. Inspirational.

High esteem captures hearts and ignites

energy.

You might be curious about many things, but curiosity about people reflects *and* develops humility.

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/11/01/how-intense-curiosity-about-people-enhances-influence-and-expands-leadership/>



Separating from Federal Service and Your TSP

At some point in the future, you will separate from federal service. That separation might be due to retirement, or you may choose to resign prior to becoming eligible for retirement, but the Thrift Savings Plan will not care why you separated. Once you have separated and cleared the payroll system, the TSP will allow you to take your money out of the plan if you choose to do so. It takes around thirty days before the TSP is aware that you have left federal service, so do not expect immediate access to your TSP funds. You can also leave your funds in the TSP if you want; in fact, the Thrift Board prefers that you leave your funds on deposit with them.

Once you separate from federal service, you will no longer be allowed to contribute to the TSP; TSP contributions must come from payroll deductions, and you will no longer be on the payroll. This is just about the only difference between an active federal employee and one who has left federal service. As a former employee, you will still be able to do all the other things that current employees do, such as:

You will still be able to re-balance your TSP account by means of inter-fund transfers. You will be subject to the same restrictions on inter-fund transfers that current employees face; that is, you will be limited to two unrestricted transfers per month, with additional transfers being allowed only if they are moving money into the G fund from the other funds (called “safe harbor” transfers).

You will still be able to roll or transfer qualified money from other individual or employer sponsored retirement accounts into the TSP. Upcoming articles will discuss rollovers both in and out of the TSP.

There are some differences between current and separated employees:

- A separated employee can withdraw their money from the TSP at any time, while a current employee can only withdraw money from the TSP if they are age 59 ½ or over

(see my earlier article on “age-based withdrawals”).

- A separated employee will have to start taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) at the age of 70 ½, while a current employee who has reached 70 ½ is not required to take a RMD.

Those who have separated by retiring and those who have separated by resigning will have the same choices as to how to withdraw their money from the TSP, if they decide to do so. The Thrift Savings Plan has several choices of withdrawal method. These methods are covered in the TSP publication, *Withdrawing Your TSP Account After Leaving Federal Service*, which can be found in the “forms and publications” section of the TSP website. Future articles will go deeply into those choices, but there are a few items we should address here.

Federal income taxes will have to be paid on all withdrawals from the Traditional portion of your TSP. Whether or not state income taxes need to be paid will depend on the state in which you live; some states do not have an income tax, and others may exempt all or part of retirement income.

Federal income taxes may have to be paid on the portion of withdrawals from the Roth portion of your TSP if those withdrawals are not qualified, as may state income taxes. To be considered qualified, you must have had your Roth balance in your TSP account for at least five years and you must be at least 59 ½ years old. Refer to my earlier article on taxes for more information on this topic.

You will still have to resolve any outstanding TSP loans, either by paying them off, or by taking a taxable distribution of the outstanding loan balance.

Article taken from:

<http://www.fedweek.com/tsp/separating-federal-service-tsp/>

YOU'LL NEVER BE GREAT AND UNGRATEFUL AT THE SAME TIME



Unexpressed gratitude is ungratefulness to those around you.

An unexpected gratitude list for leaders:

1. Celebrate the circumstances you're tempted to complain about. Challenges teach you more than ease. Character directly connects to the adversities you have pushed through.
2. Appreciate the second chance others give you. Remember how others adapt when you try new ideas.
3. Value opportunities to learn. Feeling like others always need to learn from you often produces ungratefulness in you.
4. Respect the shoulders you stand on. The good others see in you resided in someone before you. Self-made is an arrogant myth.
5. Admire those who choose to follow your leadership.
6. Recognize that problems and challenges add value to your leadership.

7. Acknowledge that serving is a privilege. Expressing gratitude shifts your thinking from burden to opportunity. Enjoy your seat at the table.

Gratitude from you:

1. Confirms that others matter.
2. Releases from the past.
3. Strengthens connection.
4. Infuses with energy.

Express it, don't wait to feel it.

Think about who or what you should feel grateful for even if you don't feel it. Make a list. Write a note. Make a call. Pat someone on the back.

Perhaps the greatest power of gratitude is it changes you.

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/11/25/youll-never-be-great-and-ungrateful-at-the-same-time/>

RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

GENERIC QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF FEDERAL TELEWORKERS' EXPERIENCES

RESEARCH PROJECT

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

- Are you a federal employee?
- Are you currently a teleworker?
- Have you teleworked for at least 1 year with the federal government?
- Are you located in Houston, Texas or within the Southwest Texas Region?

□

If you answered “yes” to these questions, then you can help by participating in this research!

The researcher is a doctoral learner and wants to learn about federal employees' perspectives of their home and work-life experiences as teleworkers. The researcher also wants to know how federal teleworker's describe their experiences in terms of employee engagement and social interaction among coworkers. In addition, the researcher will examine federal teleworker's perceptions of work-life balance versus work-life integration.

You may not have a personal or professional relationship with the researcher.

Once researcher determines if you eligible for this study:

1. You will be sent a letter and Informed Consent Form via email to sign and return to the researcher by email or mail.
2. Once you have returned the form via email or mail, the researcher will contact you to set up a formal interview.

3. For the face-to-face interview you will be asked to:

- Answer questions during an interview about the home and work life experiences as a federal teleworker. Your identity will be protected because a numerical coding system will be used.
- You will provide demographic questions (e.g., city and state where you reside, age range, gender, highest education level, and current employment status) during the face-to-face interview. The interview will be held in a private room of a local library, Skype, or an agreed location.

4. The taped interview will be transcribed.
5. Finally, the researcher will ask you to review and clarify, if necessary, your transcribed interview.

Please Note: Your participation in the study will remain confidential and you may leave the study at any time. Information from this study might help people assist other federal teleworkers in the future.

The researcher conducting this study is Danita Woodson a doctoral learner. Her email is dwoodson1@capellauniversity.edu and her phone number is 832-923-3561.

The study is being completed through Capella University; Minneapolis, Minnesota.